

MAY 26, 1983

So little time is left to hold the spring season in the Shortgrass Country that the older songbirds are showing signs of going back south. Grass for nesting material is in short supply. Not to mention that the air is so dry that any tune longer than a couple of stanzas causes critical dry breaks.

Drouths are a lot easier to start than they are to stop. Several promising fronts have gone north of us. I hate to see the rain belt come too close to the ranch. If it has to be dry, I want it to cover a big enough scope of country to prohibit hiring a truck to run from the scourge. I sure don't want to try curing another dry spell on a monthly pasturage payment plan. The last time we pulled that stunt we had everybody in a jam, including a big bank and a fair sized loan company.

Until last week I had my banker under an excellent oral backgrounding program. Before the daily paper in Angelo published a drouth report, I had my jug about half convinced that the reason I was still feeding in late May was to condition their collateral for a big grand slam next fall. I'd spent a lot of effort preparing the spiel. At times I found myself believing it was the truth.

But once the drouth report hit the Sunday pages I knew the old "I've been missing a few showers" routine was over. To worsen the luck, my neighbor, Goat Whiskers the Younger, blabbed all over four paragraphs in the newspaper about how tough it was on his outfit. I can't fault Whiskers for playing for the disaster program, but I do wish he'd cleared the timing with me before he sprang the news in print.

It is true that we are still feeding our cattle. We are on a two day a week feed run. The bulk feed ran out the last week in April. So far, we haven't been able to make the sacked goods work as well as auguring cubes from a tank.

For one thing, the protein value of the wind has dropped below five percent. When our neighbors stopped feeding, the atmosphere must have fallen 10 or 11 percent in total digestive nutrients. Once they stopped their feed wagons, the Vitamin C from the sun was all the advantage we were getting from an outdoor operation.

But back to the sacked feed. Our cows learn from eating under an auger to enjoy being showered by meal and crumbs. Using sacks, we can't immerse the old sisters in the fines from the cubes. I've been thinking of inventing a fogging machine that'd spread straight cottonseed meal out of the back of a pickup. As high as the winds have been the past few months, a sewing machine motor would be enough to power the blower. With a little thought, I think big reductions could be made in feed costs fooling those black beggars. I know the chemical companies made tons of money once they learned to add talcum powder to all their recipes.

Only Whiskers knows why he wanted to blow our cover. I was going to shoot for a big advance and then confess that at the outside we had another 18 days left to stay afloat. True, Whiskers was doing right by playing for the sympathy of the politicians. Other than a voter's registration receipt, you never know what might catch those guys' eyes. In the big drouth in the '50s the best stud poker player in San Angelo took a day off from his cards and had his picture taken feeding a bunch of old cows while President Eisenhower was here to look over the drouth. Before the negatives were developed, hay

was on the way down here from back east. At one time it looked like the whole countryside was going to be covered in government feed just because that card player threw such a bluff in the direction of the President of the United States.

The winds blew every night last week. I have to find some way to cheapen our feed costs. I have had a whole lifetime to change professions. In a spring like this one, I wish I'd made a change.